



JROTC

Recent Trends and Developments

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Some people think that the Army is no longer hiring, or that if it is, its real missions are long gone. Those attitudes flow from the growing disconnect between the military and the rest of society. A 30-second spot during the Super Bowl may tell part of the soldiers' story, but reconnecting the military with society means people with military experience meeting people without it. The expanding Junior ROTC program turns soldiers into teachers and provides training and adventure for high school youth, while opening their eyes to the exciting opportunities beyond.

THE JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICERS' Training Corps (JROTC) is flourishing. Enjoying strong support at both the national and local levels, it boasts a larger enrollment and encompasses more high schools than ever in its 85-year history. In fact, the Army cannot accommodate all of the institutional applicants for the program. Midway through 2000, more than 300 secondary schools were on the waiting list for new units, and that list was growing weekly. Geographically, JROTC stretches around the world. It is now offered in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam and overseas in Department of Defense (DOD)-operated schools for military dependents.¹

Post-Cold War Growth

Between 1992 and 2000 enrollment nearly doubled while unit strength rose by 60 percent due to an expansion President George H. Bush announced on 24 August 1992. Bush described JROTC as "a great program that boosts high school completion rates, reduces drug use, raises self-esteem and gets these kids firmly on the right track."² The Fiscal Year 1993 National Defense Authorization Act raised the maximum allowable number of JROTC units DOD-wide from 1600 to 3500.³

Bush's expansion plan called for the Army to boost its institutional base from 875 to 1682 units between 1992 and 1997. Operation *Young Citizen*, the US Army Cadet Command named the plan, proceeded as scheduled until March 1995 when the expansion stalled at its existing level of approximately 1370 schools. Fiscal shortfalls stopped program growth 305 schools short of the original expansion goal.

A special effort was made to bring in institutions that, according to DOD criteria, qualified as educationally or economically disadvantaged schools. Institutions in these categories, many of which were rural and

inner-city schools, could receive up to five years of special financial assistance if they agreed to host a JROTC unit. Overall, about 35 percent of the institutions added to the program between 1992 and 1995 benefited from such aid.

Operation *Young Citizen* also had ambitious geographic distribution objectives and emphasized establishing units across the northern states (particularly New England) where JROTC was underrepresented. By 1995 institutional representation across this northern belt had risen by more than 100 percent. Another *Young Citizen* goal was to have a JROTC program in every state. It met this goal in September 1995 by establishing a unit in White Mountains High School, Whitefield, Vermont.⁴

Today, JROTC is on the verge of another round of growth. In July 1999 Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera announced the start of a second post-Cold War expansion with the goal of adding 275 units by 2005. The current plan is to add 50 high schools in school year 2000-01 and approximately 45 more each year for the next five years.

JROTC Support

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, the need for a huge US Army receded. At the same time, pressures built to use the military in ways that would help meet some of the United States' domestic needs. One of the most articulate and influential voices advocating a wider societal role for the US Armed Forces was Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia. Nunn urged that the "military's spectrum of capabilities" be reinvigorated to address urgent social problems such as the lack of role models for young people. In his opinion, the "hard-working, disciplined" men and women of the Armed Forces could "serve as a very powerful force among our young people—especially where family structures are weakened by poverty, drugs and crime." He viewed JROTC as one instrument through which the services could interact with the inner-city youth.⁵

While leaders like Nunn helped create a supportive environment for JROTC growth, it was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell who focused DOD's attention and resources on the expansion. Powell characterized JROTC as the "best opportunity for the Department of Defense to make a positive impact on the Nation's youth." He felt that junior programs would be particularly valuable in the inner cities, especially after the Los Angeles riots in April 1992. He visited the site of the disturbances and came away convinced that JROTC, with its emphasis on responsible citizenship and respect for authority, would help dissuade young people from destructive behavior and guide them along more productive paths.⁶

National-level support for expansion was bound up with the difficult recruiting environment of the late 1990s. A booming economy with its abundance of entry-level jobs, coupled with an increased percentage of high school students continuing on to college, has cut deeply into the Army's traditional recruiting market of noncollege-bound high school graduates. Although JROTC is not intended as a recruiting program, surveys indicate that approximately 42 percent of every JROTC graduating class expects to establish some connection with one of the military services. Surveys also indicate that JROTC cadets are five times more likely than their contemporaries to join the military.

Some of this recruiting success among JROTC graduates can be attributed to enhanced cooperation between JROTC instructors and re-

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cruiters. Cadet Command now works more closely with the US Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) than it did in the past, facilitating USAREC's work by outlining career options to students, emphasizing that military service is an honorable calling and providing incentives that reinforce JROTC instructors' efforts. DOD allows a student who has completed two years of JROTC to enlist as an E-2; a three-year program participant can enlist as an E-3.⁷

However, the formal, overt efforts are not primarily responsible for the high accession rates. Many cadets join JROTC because they want to enlist in the military. This propensity is nurtured through their interaction with instructors in the classroom and in a variety of informal settings. For many of these cadets, JROTC instructors are the most important adult role models in their lives—they project an image more powerful than any advertising campaign or recruiting pitch.

Transcending and fueling both rounds of expansion were concerns senior defense officials and prominent academicians shared about the Army's shrinking "footprint" in society. The post-Cold War drawdown, with its personnel reductions, base closings and college ROTC unit closings, had lowered the Army's visibility. It seemed to some that the Army was shrinking to the point of social irrelevance. As channels of interaction

and involvement between the services and the public disappeared, public support for and understanding of the military appeared to erode. These conditions made outreach a critical function. Sociologist Charles Moskos advised the Army to "maximize the number of young people . . . who pass through a military experience."⁸ JROTC, centered in the Nation's secondary school system, offers one of the few avenues through which the services can directly interact with an important segment of the larger society.⁹

Parents and school officials at host sites provide the most decisive support for program expansion, thus creating a demand for new programs. This support is attributable largely to the program's salutary effects on students and host institutions. Principals indicate that having a JROTC program reduces disciplinary problems in their schools. Key performance measures indicate that cadets attend class more frequently, are less likely to drop out of school and are more likely to graduate than their peers. According to Moskos, JROTC cadets have a 10- to 15-percent higher graduation rate than their peers in the same high school. Cadets also demonstrate slightly better academic performance than their contemporaries in the general school population (GPA 2.8 versus 2.6, SAT 823 versus 821 and ACT 20.5 versus 19).¹⁰

New ROTC lieutenants taking the officer's commissioning oath.



US Army

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The Program of Instruction

From the Army's standpoint, the program's effectiveness is evaluated against the objectives that support the mission, which is "to motivate young people to be better citizens." Supporting objectives include:

- Promoting citizenship.
- Developing leadership.
- Enhancing communication skills.
- Strengthening self-esteem.
- Providing the incentive to live drug free.
- Learning to appreciate the military services and their accomplishments.
- Improving physical fitness.
- Promoting high school graduation.
- Learning to work as a team member.

The program of instruction includes citizenship, leadership, communications, military history, drug awareness and physical fitness. Teamwork, improved self-esteem and high school graduation derive from the total program and JROTC instructors' active mentorship and guidance. Compounding variables prevent precise measurement; yet it is undeniable that JROTC, fielded as a dollar-sharing partnership between the federal and local levels, produces positive results.¹¹

Since 1992 the US Army Cadet Command has taken various steps to improve program administration and instruction—steps that its senior leaders believe have strengthened the program's local popularity. Former ROTC Commander Major General Wallace Arnold spearheaded the first expansion because he recognized the need to bolster JROTC's organizational infrastructure to accommodate the growth in unit strength. Arnold fortified the Director of Army Instruction's (DAI's) position to manage the program at the school district level. He also introduced a training and orientation program for JROTC instructors to ensure that all instructors understood program goals. In the mid-1990s the US Army Cadet Command streamlined, centralized and standardized program administration by cutting JROTC staff at the three ROTC region headquarters

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and enlarging the staff at the national headquarters.¹²

The US Army Cadet Command is also upgrading its instructional technology. Parts of the instructors' orientation course are currently being converted to a web-based format. In addition, a number of interactive, multimedia instructional modules are being prepared for cadets' use. These web-based modules will supplement, not replace, participatory instruction. Revising the curriculum to bring it in line with current needs and educational trends has been another priority.

Over the past several years, a special effort has been made to align the program with three national educational strategies—the National Education Goals, the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills and the President's Summit. The latest leadership education and training materials have added staff rides and blocks of instruction on etiquette, nutrition, conflict resolution, multicultural diversity, geography, the environment and service learning opportunities. Embedded in instructional modules are programs on learning styles, skills mapping, authentic assessments and portfolios. Self-paced texts have recently been adopted to resolve scheduling conflicts and facilitate home schooling.

In conjunction with its counterparts in the US Air Force and Navy, the US Army Cadet Command has also developed interservice, cross-indexed drill and marksmanship manuals. An interservice manual on orienteering is currently being compiled. These efforts are significant because of the impact on training and the improved interservice cooperation they represent.¹³

JROTC Opponents

The program does have opponents. Some claim that JROTC is an instrument for militarizing the Nation's youth, little more than a thinly veiled recruiting device. Critics also say it promotes guns and violence as means to resolve conflicts and has an inappropriate curriculum that indoctrinates impressionable high school students with nationalistic and martial ideals rather than teaching them to think critically. Others contend that the program does not positively affect college enrollments or employment potential. In fact, some argue that it actually hurts disadvantaged youth. According to them, by obligating a host institution to share costs, JROTC diverts resources away from programs that might help deprived young people qualify for higher education or employment. Some even question the Army's claims of success, attributing the impressive statistics more to carefully screening applicants than to anything inherent in the program.¹⁴

These contentions misrepresent the program's focus. The US Army Cadet Command does not regard or represent JROTC as a vehicle to morally and educationally uplift hard-core delinquents. Rather, the program is designed for youth seeking direction and a sense of belonging. Many of them are not high academic achievers and do not plan to attend college. In the main, they are students who could go either way—they could go on to become productive and responsible citizens or join the ranks of the alienated and disaffected. The command is convinced that which way they eventually go depends on their high school role models and experiences.

Other critics believe that the military should play little or no role in civilian affairs. To them, subsidizing a program like JROTC only diverts time, attention and resources from more pressing priorities. The

Active-duty officers and noncommissioned officers train cadets in tactical skills ranging from marksmanship to land navigation.

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money spent on providing military role models and mentors for high-risk youth, in their opinion, could be better used on improving readiness or modernizing America's aging arsenal.¹⁵

Still others see a misplaced emphasis on tradition, display and the military's external trappings. One retired Army general asserted that the "backbone" of JROTC was "training right out of 1895: rifles, trinket-laden uniforms, drill and ceremonies, plus a modicum of physical fitness." Like many others, he wanted the Army to "raise cadet sights above winning drill competitions to computer-aided skill acquisition."¹⁶

Although the Army JROTC has recently begun to move in the direction the general suggested, most students do not participate in the program to enhance their academic skills or future marketability. They want the sense of belonging and purpose it gives them. This sense of belonging results from working on community-service projects, supporting school events, participating in drill competitions or engaging in various other unit activities. Often done in uniform under military supervision, these team-building activities obviate feelings of alienation that afflict so many adolescents. While drilling, wearing uniforms and adhering to military customs and courtesies might seem irrelevant or counterproductive to some observers, experience shows that they help to create a sense of identity many cadet contemporaries either lack or get from nonproductive groups such as gangs.

Prospects

If history is any guide, JROTC's bright future could quickly change. Many uniformed resource managers looking at a program's fiscal bottom line rather than its long-term but unquantifiable effects on civil-military relations and the moral development of the Nation's youth will undoubtedly continue to view JROTC as an expensive luxury. And officers who feel the Army should avoid involvement in civilian projects will continue to regard it as a diversion from the Army's principal mission. Congressional backing for JROTC, while solid at present, is extremely susceptible to changing budget priorities.

Support for the program has been most intense and most enduring at the local level. It was a grassroots movement that fueled program growth in the mid-1990s, and it is a grassroots movement that is propelling the

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expansion today, as evidenced by the ever-growing list of school principals and superintendents asking for new units. If JROTC maintains the gains it has made in the post-Cold-War era, it will undoubtedly be this local support base that is largely responsible. **MR**

NOTES

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